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## NIGERIA Over 40 killed after attack on Catholic church provokes communal violence

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Over 40 people have been killed in the Nigerian city of Jos, Plateau State, after around 200 Muslim youths attacked Christians near a Catholic Church in Nasarawa Jos, yesterday, sparking retaliatory violence.

According to local sources, the Muslim youths claimed to have gathered to renovate a house next to St. Michael's Catholic Church owned by a Muslim man who allegedly murdered three Christians during violence in Jos North in November 2008. However, instead of renovating the house, the youths are reported to have launched an unprovoked assault on a female passer-by before attacking St Michael's Church, killing and injuring several members. They also set fire to a score of local houses and businesses and churches, including a Christ Apostolic Church and an ECWA Church (Evangelical Church of West Africa) in Dutse Uku and another ECWA Church in Rikkos. Angered by the violence, Christian youths gathered to launch a counter attack, and the violence soon spread to other areas of Jos North.

An eye witness informed CSW today that he counted 20 corpses in Jos University Teaching Hospital, 19 in the Airforce Hospital, 10 in Plateau State Specialist Hospital, and seven more lying on the road. The military were also seen loading bodies into trucks.

At a press conference held on Sunday, Plateau State's Police Commissioner attributed the violence to the unprovoked attack on St Michael's Church, and said that 30 armed people had been arrested in connection with the attack, five of whom were wearing military uniform.

CSW-UK's Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas said: "This incident is the latest in a series of attacks on the Christian community of Jos that began in 2001. Unfortunately, since perpetrators of religious violence are rarely brought to justice, many in northern and central states no longer trust the authorities to guarantee their safety. This must be addressed by state and federal authorities if we are to see an end to the tragic cycle of religious violence in Northern and central Nigeria". Rev Yunusa Nmadu, CEO of CSW Nigeria concurred: "If the people arrested in connection with the November 2008 violence and reportedly transferred to Abuja for trial had indeed been prosecuted, this would be a deterrent, and perhaps the current violence may not have occurred".